

June 1998

Providing Access to Electronic Journals: The Ohio University Experience

Laura Hudson

Ohio University Libraries, hudsonl@ouvaxa.ohiou.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <https://docs.lib.purdue.edu/atg>



Part of the [Library and Information Science Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Hudson, Laura (1998) "Providing Access to Electronic Journals: The Ohio University Experience," *Against the Grain*: Vol. 10: Iss. 3, Article 6.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7771/2380-176X.2781>

This document has been made available through Purdue e-Pubs, a service of the Purdue University Libraries. Please contact epubs@purdue.edu for additional information.



Against the Grain

ISSN: 1043-2094

"Linking Publishers, Vendors and Librarians"

Providing Access to Electronic Journals: The Ohio University Experience

by **Laura Hudson** and **Laura Windsor**, Reference Librarians, Ohio University Libraries <hudsonl@ouvaxa.cats.ohiou.edu>

Ohio University, as a member of OhioLINK and of the 20th century, has seen an exponential increase in electronic journals over the past two years. This exciting development has brought challenges for library staff. The challenges to our library span every department and have required making some key decisions about how to handle electronic journal subscriptions. Our focus at this point is on scholarly electronic journals.



Electronic Journals at Ohio University

The scholarly electronic journals which we subscribe to can be divided into several categories: those which we receive through OhioLINK, those which we buy in aggregate (e.g. JSTOR journals and Project MUSE journals), subscriptions to individual journals, and electronic journals which are free with a print subscription. These total in the hundreds, with by far the largest numbers coming from the first two divisions. A listing of our scholarly electronic journals is available at: <http://www.library.ohiou.edu/electres/epub/epubjour.htm>.

Acquisition of electronic journals

Although OhioLINK has done much of our electronic journals

acquisitions for us by acquiring Academic Press and Elsevier Science collections, we also collect individual e-journal titles. Thus, the first hurdle is for a particular bibliographer to become aware of an electronic journal. This can be problematic because not all librarians spend time using the Internet in the course of their regular duties. For this reason, it is helpful if there is somebody in the library who has the time to hunt down e-journals and tell various bibliographers about them.

In our library, we've decided to give one person (**Laura Hudson**) the job of "electronic resources bibliographer." It is her duty to inform bibliographers of electronic journals in their subject area so that they can inform faculty liaisons and, perhaps, put them on Web-based subject guides. In actuality, because Laura has other duties as well, the task of locating electronic journals has fallen to an in-

continued on page 16

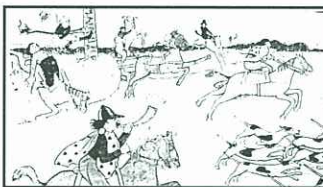
If Rumors Were Horses

Lots of news this month! The ebulliently fantastic **Martha Whittaker** <mwhitt@bouldernews.infi.net> is joining **Academic Book Center** as Vice President of Marketing effective June 1! She will be working out of her Denver office, with regular trips to Portland. Martha says she will keep the same email address as well as a new one at Academic — marthaw@acbc.com. And now we can even reach her at a toll-free number, 888-236-5168. Congratulations, Martha!

Jim Rettig — that fantabulous reference reviewer, among other things — will become University Librarian at the **University of Richmond** in Richmond, Virginia, on June 10. Congratulations, Jim!

Did we tell you that **Arnold Hirshon**

(Vice Provost for Information Resources, Lehigh University) has been named the recipient of the **Hugh Atkinson Memorial Award for 1998**? The award, \$2,000 and a citation, recognizes outstanding accomplishments of an academic librarian who has worked in the areas of library automation or library management, and has made contributions (including risk-taking) towards the improvement of library services, or to library development or research. **The Faxon Company** also provides a gold giraffe pin from Tiffany's, symbolizing the "sticking-your-neck-out" aspect of the award, for the winner. The award is jointly



continued on page 8

What To Look For

In This Issue:

Death of a Salesman: The Demise of Periodical Agents? 22

Approaching Clairvoyance: Notes Toward Selection for Off-Site Shelving 23

The Paper Library: Beyond the Automated Card Catalog 76

Interviews:

Mario Casalini 85

David Cheatham 14

Jim Rose 30

Glen Secor 36

Morris Shattuck 34



1043-2094(199806)10:3;1-P

formal group of people which includes the Collection Development Coordinator, the electronic resources bibliographer, and our de facto Webmaster. Finding e-journals throughout the disciplines is easier now that there are so many listings, such as the one put out by **Faxon**, which lists electronic versions of paper journals. Librarians have also compiled many useful lists of electronic journals which we rely upon heavily.

Acquisition procedures are complicated by the electronic format, especially in a mid- to large-sized library such as ours. Any holes in the communication process become painfully apparent. One particular journal we ordered involved a password that got lost in space: it became clear at that point that we had no procedure for collecting passwords and giving them to bibliographers.

Cataloging the collection

The cataloging of electronic journals has been discussed at length and some standards have been proposed. However, there are issues which need to be dealt with on an individual library basis. To facilitate consistency, an "Electronic Journals Task Force," composed of two catalogers, one reference librarian who is also the electronic resources bibliographer, and the Coordinator for Collections Development, was created at Ohio University to pinpoint and deal with these issues. The task force was meant as a policy-writing task force, which would be dissolved once the policy was established. However, more issues, and related issues, keep coming up as our e-collections grow, so we have become an ad hoc committee.

Questions the task force has dealt with include:

✓ When is an electronic journal worth cataloging? For now the answer is when we pay for it, either directly, indirectly as part of a print subscription, or through the **OhioLINK** consortium. However, we are discussing cataloging important free Web journals as time allows.

✓ When is an electronic journal really a whole different journal and not simply a new format? We're still grappling with this one. Many electronic journals have value-added features such as **IOP's** hypercite or **Springer-Verlag's** electronic discussion forums. Some journals contain articles which aren't available in the paper version. At what point should we consider them entirely different entities, and does it matter?

✓ Should we have two separate records in the catalog for e-journals and paper journals (which I am told is "pure" cataloging), or would it be simpler for the patron to just see all formats on a single record (which I am told is, technically, fudging)? We opted for the second option because the experience of public service librarians told us that our patrons tend to look only at the first record for an item. Our theory is that we are in the business of helping people find information, not creating a gorgeous online catalog.

✓ When we download records from **OCLC**, many come with URLs in the 856 field which contain information other than an electronic copy, for instance, publisher's home pages. Should we keep this URL or provide URLs strictly for e-text? We opted for the more lenient approach, and keep the URLs if we are able to access the material. That is, we won't keep the URL if the material is subscription-only and we do not subscribe. This easy check cuts down on potential training problems which a more complex policy might involve.

✓ What should the call number be for electronic resources? Right now it says "electronic resource," but the task force members agree that assigning a basic LC call number would be superior because it would facilitate statistical analysis of our collection. This is apparently a decision which involves going through the necessary channels at **OhioLINK**, and not one which we can make on our own.

✓ What should the location field say? We have several location options based upon access level — **OhioLINK** only, **OU Athens** only, **Ohio University** — which are linked to descriptions of these terms.

✓ Do we maintain an electronic journals Web page even though we are cataloging the journals? Yes, we have decided to do so. As one astute audience member said during our talk: cataloging e-journals is very useful, but a Web listing creates a virtual stacks which people can browse. We also encourage subject bibliographers to list electronic journals on their individual Web-based subject guides. However, the breadth of Internet experience in the library means that we cannot rely on this method alone.

Technology issues

Providing access to electronic journals in the library raises some key issues in terms of library technology. Any weakness in hardware or technical support will cause great headaches for both library patrons and public service staff. It is important to have enough hardware of suitable quality for viewing and printing electronic journals. Many e-journals are using **Adobe Acrobat PDF** files, so dot matrix printers are not suitable for printing. Slow servers and too many users at the publisher's end mean frustrated patrons at the library end, and slow computers will only compound these problems. It is important to try an e-journal on patron stations, not just desktop stations, which tend to be of higher quality.

Software is also an issue — we have had to decide how many helper applications we are willing to support, and have decided that, in general,

we just can't provide access to e-journals which use anything other than **HTML** or **PDF**. Although there are some important e-journals on the market using other software applications, each application causes problems when running on a network, which means headaches for both systems support people and public services people. IP validation on the publisher end is important — without it we have to either write a **CGI** script to auto-

matically pass the password to the publisher's page based on IP address, or we have to give the password out to our patrons, which involves finding a good method for communicating this information to patrons without communicating it to non-patrons. We have not made the decision to simply quit providing access to electronic publications which do not provide IP validation, but we've certainly discussed the possibility. Of course, the ideal solution would be IP validation with

a password option for valid users who are off-campus, but we have not been provided this level of access as of yet.

The bottom line is that everything must be tested several times before it is made available, and appropriate equipment and technical support must be made available. Electronic journals (and other electronic library tools) seem relatively simple and seamless only when a lot of work is put into them behind the scenes.

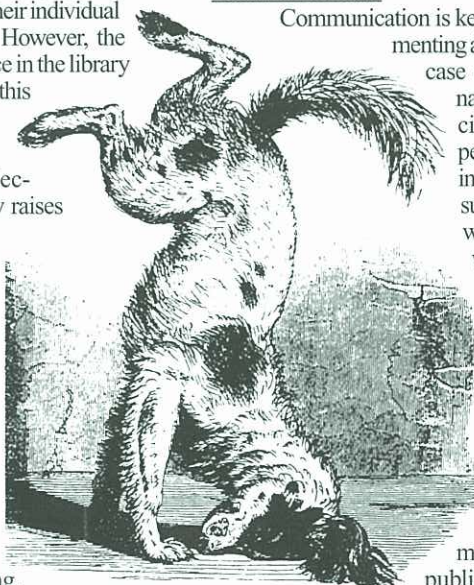
Communication

Communication is key whenever implementing a new service. In the case of electronic journals it becomes crucial. Public service people need to keep in touch with systems support people about what will work and what won't. For instance, we had a situation where **Adobe Acrobat** was not loading properly. Somebody in the systems area found a solution which involved opening **Acrobat** manually. For us in public service, this was not a solution at all because it complicated our patron's lives, and we had to let our systems staff know.

As we mentioned, public services people also need to communicate with acquisitions and cataloging staff. This new format shows the holes in our current communications procedures. We've dealt with this, although not always entirely effectively, by assigning one

continued on page 18

We have not made the decision to simply quit providing access to electronic publications which do not provide IP validation, but we've certainly discussed the possibility.



Access to Electronic Journals from page 16

person in the Reference Department and one person in the Cataloging Department to be contact points for their respective areas.

External communication is also important. We need to communicate with publishers and vendors about new content. **JSTOR**, with their "content update" messages, have been leaders in helping libraries face this hurdle. We need to improve our communications with faculty and students, as well as with our departmental liaisons. Because faculty will be primary users of many electronic journals, communication about this service can improve library-faculty relations greatly. Explaining to faculty why there are speed issues can head off grumbling and help them to understand that this new technology is still just that — new. Our favorite thing to say to a disgruntled patron waiting for their e-journal article to load or print is — "Well, it's faster than interlibrary loan" (cheerful grin). If they are in the library, we then offer to wait for the printout and send it to them via inter campus mail. One thing I have encountered is the belief that we are canceling print subscriptions because we are spending our money on electronic subscriptions. Of course, from our point of view this is not the case. Proactive communication can offset the damage done by this belief.

Training

Okay, confession time: we made a mistake which we shall not make again for a long, long time. We brought up a new service without training all of our public service staff. This really comes back to communication. Because we in reference all work within shouting distance of each other, we tend to teach each other how to use new things and forget that other departments are more isolated, even though they are just downstairs. Electronic journals seem simple, and they should be. But when you are helping a patron, it is frustrating to be using something you have never seen before, and infuriating when something goes wrong. So the lesson is: train your own staff first! This preliminary training has the added benefit of exposing technical problems, so that they can be solved before making the service public. It is also good public relations to offer training for faculty, staff and students, and can decrease the amount of time public services staff spend running around helping people with simple electronic journals queries.

Collection development

Although collection development policies are traditionally for subject areas and not formats, a policy on electronic text collecting can be helpful for bibliographers who are uncomfortable making the transition from print to electronic formats. The policy is a place to mention pertinent concerns unique to electronic formats, such as computer systems requirements, whether or not to maintain a print subscription, and evaluating prices and licensing agreements.

Statistics are often used for collection development purposes, and it has always been difficult to gather statistics for journals because, at


least at the places where I've worked, journals don't circulate. The possibilities for gathering statistics for e-journals are much greater, because Web servers keep these statistics easily. At the time that we gave this talk, most vendors and publishers were not providing statistics. Now, half a year later, it seems that most are providing them. The challenge is to get all of these various statistics from various vendors with various sorts of systems into a common format which is useful for analysis. We've developed an informal committee to look at statistics for both Web-based databases and e-journals in order to come up with some general guidelines as to what kind of information we need. Again, on our end it would help to give e-journals LC call numbers so that we can analyze our own collections accurately.

License agreements

The question of license agreements reigns large when discussing access to e-journals. From a public service perspective, the most important issue is who can access the journal and how. If they need to type in a password, we need to find a way of getting that password to the patron in a way which is as easy as possible. If the company can do IP address validation, we need to be able to figure out what our IP addresses actually are and who is to be included and excluded — it gets complicated on a large campus with six branches, a hospital, an affiliated hotel, an affiliated regional freenet ... and the IP addresses were not apparently allocated in simple chunks but rather in some sort of convoluted manner so that the library includes several numerical ranges, with exceptions within the ranges. Because we want users who are not within the correct IP range to have some sort of an explanation rather than a publisher-allocated "error!" message, we maintain our own CGI scripts which check IP address and either pass the user to the journal or to a page containing a gentle "access denied" message with an explanation and the telephone number for the reference desk.

Providing access: a public services viewpoint

When you work at the reference desk helping patrons for two to four hours of your day, it colors the way you look at things. E-journals are, theoretically, very exciting for reasons which we all know: greater access from more locations, possibilities for inter-linking and intra-linking, the possibility for supplementary materials of sorts we perhaps haven't even imagined. And even dealing with the day-to-day hassles of writing new policy, fixing technical problems, sorting out license agreements, and hunting down passwords is intellectually rewarding. What is not rewarding is soothing a frustrated patron who has just waited fifteen minutes for a journal article to load only to have their computer freeze, or watching an undergraduate's eyes glaze over as you de-

scribe the steps to get the article they need, or explaining to a professor in another building why they could get to this journal yesterday, but can't today. Clearly, research is a complicated process. We would not be doing our patrons any favors if we simplify the process to the extent of losing functionality. But neither should our public have to deal with computers that freeze, ridiculously slow servers, an undertrained staff, or inconsistent cataloging records. The public should not need to know how to use six helper applications in order to access an article. From a public service perspective, patrons should not be used as test cases, and to treat them as such will put the reputation of the library at risk. Clearly, libraries need to test new products extensively, support them appropriately, train staff members, work with publishers and vendors to find ways of improving the service, and write policies to deal with the issues that electronic journals create — preferably before providing extensive access in a public setting. 

NB: This paper is based on a talk given at the 1997 Charleston Conference.

Rumors from page 12

Hmmm ... In Australia, **government documents** aren't automatically in the public domain. You should check out what **Lloyd Rich** says in this issue about the United States and public domain documents, see this issue, p.46.

Whatever happened to **Glenn Jaeger**? Well, the former Vice President of **Alfred Jaeger, Inc.** and manager of **The Faxon Company** has started his own business with partner **Tracey Clarke** (also formerly of Faxon) called **Absolute Backorder Service, Inc.** (that's Absolute with an "e" - not the vodka). Absolute is a backorder fulfillment service which supplies periodicals to universities worldwide. Glenn is also the new father of a baby girl! With a new business and a new addition to the family, you can see he is going to continue to be pretty busy! If you want to find out more about Absolute, visit their website at <http://www.absolute-inc.com>.

Quite a few of you are visiting the **ATG** homepage! A recent visitor was **Marseille (Marcy) Pride** (Collection Management/Interlibrary Loan, University of Maryland, Baltimore County, 1000 Hilltop Circle, Baltimore, MD 21250; voice: (410) 455-2341; fax: (410) 455-1061 <pride@umbc.edu>) who was requesting information on this year's **Charleston Conference**!

I plan to be there! **Barbara Moran** (Dean and Professor, School of Information and Library Science, UNC-CH) sends word that Beta Phi Mu is planning to resume its annual lecture series at this summer's ALA and the first speaker in the series is **Dr. Edward G. Holley** speaking on the topic of "Librarianship and Scholarship through Five Decades: A Personal View," on Sunday, June 28th, in the Dolly *continued on page 20*